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ABSTRACT

A description of basket weaving techniques and materials used by the Karuk Indians of northwestern California includes illustrations and Karuk language terms so that the booklet may be used to enrich Karuk bilingual classes as well as to interest knowledgeable basketweavers. A section on materials discusses identifying, gathering, and preparing willow and hazel sticks; sugar pine, pine, and willow roots; bear grass; woodwardia and maidenhair ferns; porcupine quills; and alder bark and moss for dyes. Illustrations of and Karuk words for materials and preparation processes supplement the text. A section on basket types describes baby baskets, burden baskets, sifting baskets, eel basket traps, acorn pounding baskets, storage baskets, acorn sifting baskets, cooking baskets, acorn soup bowls, decorated baskets, tobacco pouches, and basket hats. Illustrations of each basket type, Karuk terms, particular characteristics of each basket, and its use in Karuk society accompany each description. A final section provides step-by-step instructions for starting a basket including soaking, body positioning, frame of mind, start a basket with open and closed weave twining, adding sticks, and color overlay designs. Each step is clearly illustrated. A Karuk Unifon alphabet and an Indian Unifon alphabet are provided. (LFL)

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Basketmaking Among the Karuk

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1984

NATIVE LANGUAGE GOALS

COMMUNICATION

Communicate in a second language:

- -Comprehend the spoken language
- -Speak the language comprehensibly
- -Comprehend the written language
- -Write the language comprehensibly

CULTURAL FUNCTIONING

Function in the culture in which the language is used:

- -Be aware of the attitudes, values, customs, traditions, and taboos of the culture
- -Interpret and use body language and other types of nonverbal communication
- -Use language signals appropriately in a variety of social contexts

APPRECIATION OF LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND VALUES

Appreciate the similarities and diversities among languages, cultures, and value systems within the United States and throughout the world:

- -Compare cultural patterns from native and foreign cultures
- -Become familiar with the environments in which cultural groups have developed

This Basket Book can be used by the teacher to meet the above goals through class discussion.

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Introduction

Basket weaving techniques and materials are discussed in this volume, which is intended to interest knowledgeable basketweavers and Karuk teachers and students, as well as to acquaint other students within the Karuk community with one of the finest arts of the Northwest California American Indian. Karuk language terms are included so that the book may be used to enrich Karuk bilingual classes.

What are Karuk bilingual classes?

The Bilingual Education Program of the Center for Community Development at Humboldt State University, through Title VII of the ESEA Act (administered by the U. S. Office of Bilingual Education), is the only university program in the state of California which offers an elementary teaching credential with an emphasis on Hupa, Yurok, Karuk, or Tolowa language and culture. The project carries on several coordinated activities, including teacher training, curriculum development, continuing education in Indian communities, and innovation in higher education.

The project is now in its sixth year of funding as a bilingual teacher training program. Twelve university students are currently training to receive teaching credentials, and there are eight fluent bilingual teachers offering classes ranging from first grade through university levels.

The primary objective of the Bilingual Education Program is to promote bilingual/bicultural literacy among Northern California native peoples. The bilingual community teachers work with university staff in analyzing key concepts in their languages; the Program staff then prepares instructional materials that develop bilingual literacy in a way compatible with ideas of tribal elders from the four tribes.

This book is authentic information gathered from and compiled by Karuk people, and represents the high quality of production that can be accomplished by cooperation between the Indian community and the University.

Karuk Alphabet

KARUK UNIFON

SINGLE SOUND ALPHABET

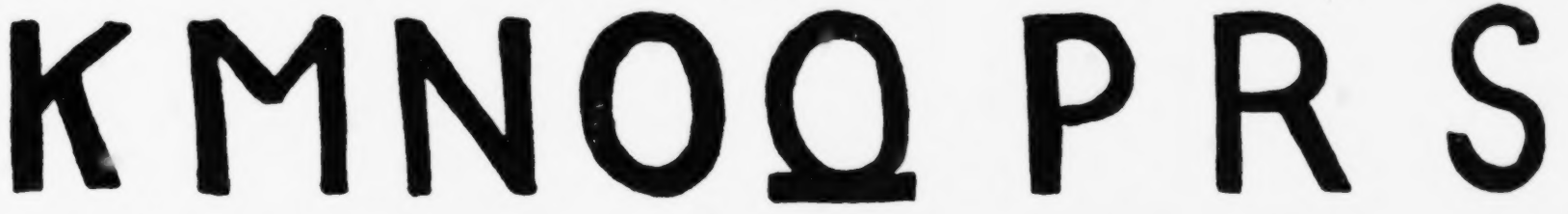
NOTE: The Karuk "R" is pronounced by tapping the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth.

The "O" may be nasalized: Õ

The sound "A" (as in apple) occurs rarely in Karuk.

YA-RI-PUX-WO MOC-MOC O+-SII KUC-OIIP F+θ-θI XOC-KOM-HUR +T-ROP PA-COR-ROK

(girl) (cow) (dog) (porcupine) (foot) (bow) (five) (otter)



UK-RO UP-MON O+N-N+M COP VI-RQ-COR POF-F+O OR-RI-PI +S-KAS

(eel) (mouth) (skunk) (steelhead) (bear) (deer) (dip net) (river)

T-IIV PIIθ YIθ-U +F-FO-NI TUC-VON UX-WO YOP U-XUK

(ear) (four) (one) (hair) (cooking paddle) (head) (eye) (two)

©1961 FCCA

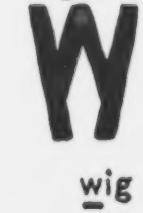
INDIAN UNIFON

SINGLE-SOUND ALPHABET

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
TL	(~gargle) khah	at	ate	all	bow	cell say	chair	dip	hen	he	her

13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
fast	goat	hat	bit	bite	jaw	kiss	low	music	no

23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
king	lot	old	look	out	boy	pipe	run	sure	table

33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
									
thirst	there	up	due	you	vest	wig	azure	yes	zebra

12

13

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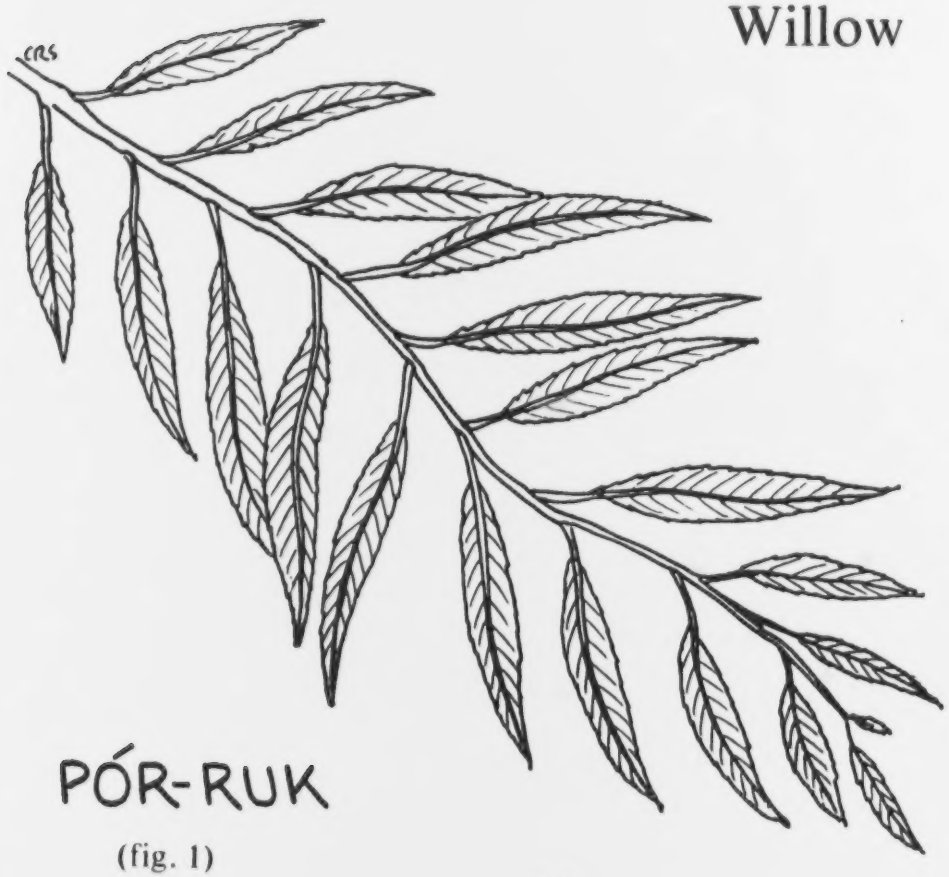
Basket Materials

III. Materials

When gathering materials, the gatherer should always give thanks for these materials and not take more than is needed.

A. Sticks (U-HOP)

The sticks are the foundation or warp of the basket.

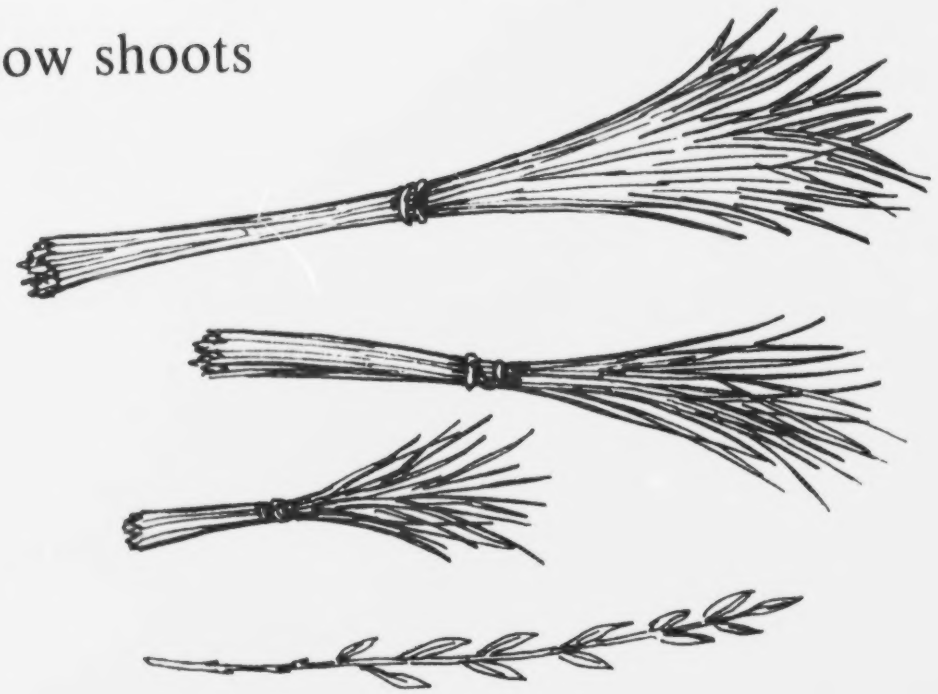


(fig. 1)

1. Willow (PǑR-RUK)

Willow shoots are gathered in April or August. New shoots of the grey willow are cut before the buds are open. They grow along the rivers and streams. The bark is stripped off before it dries out. Sticks are then sorted according to width and length, and stored in bundles.

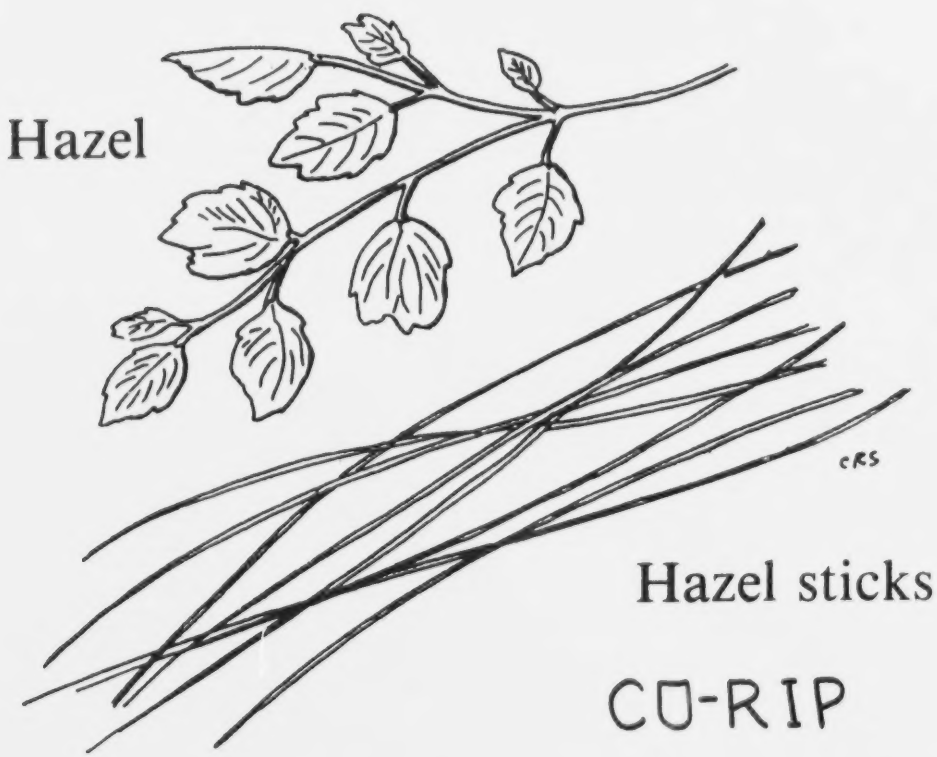
Willow shoots



(fig. 2)

2. Hazel

Hazel sticks are cut in April or May. The patch is burned after it is cut so the next year's growth will be strong, uniform, and straight. The sticks are peeled after they are cut, then sorted and stored.



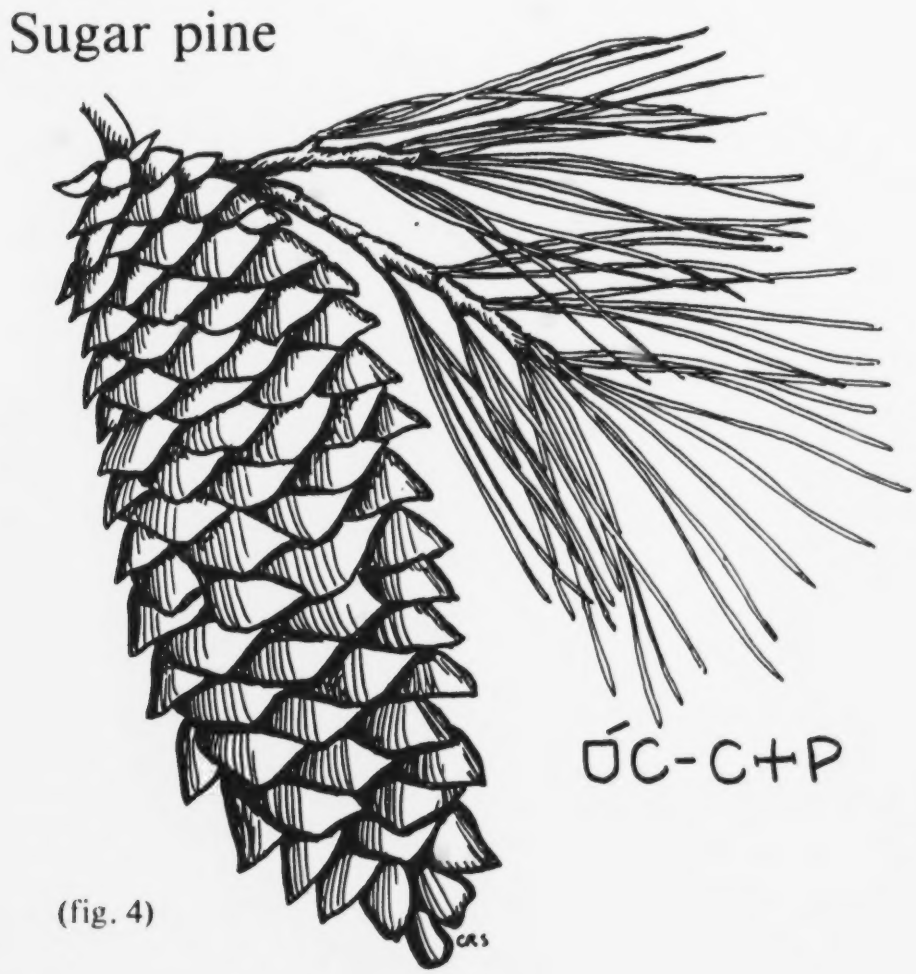
(fig. 3)

B. Roots

Roots are used for the weft of the weaving.

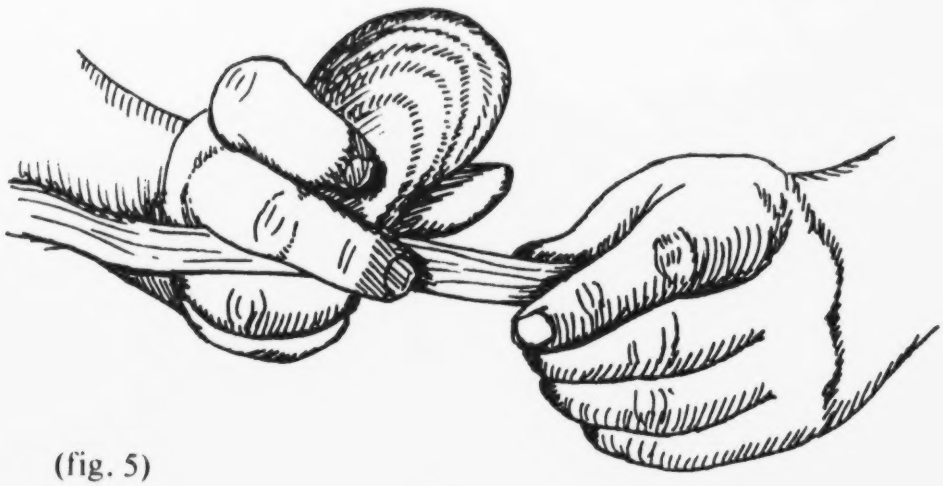
1. Sugar Pine (ÓC-C+P)

The root may be dug up any time of the year, in a moist soft area, where there are no rocks. Care should be taken to not overdig an area and to not take more than can be used in a year.



(fig. 4)

Sugar pine roots are first soaked or boiled to soften the bark for scraping. They are then split into smaller sections for storage. Later roots are soaked again and then scraped, with a mussel shell or knife (fig. 5), to break them down for splitting.

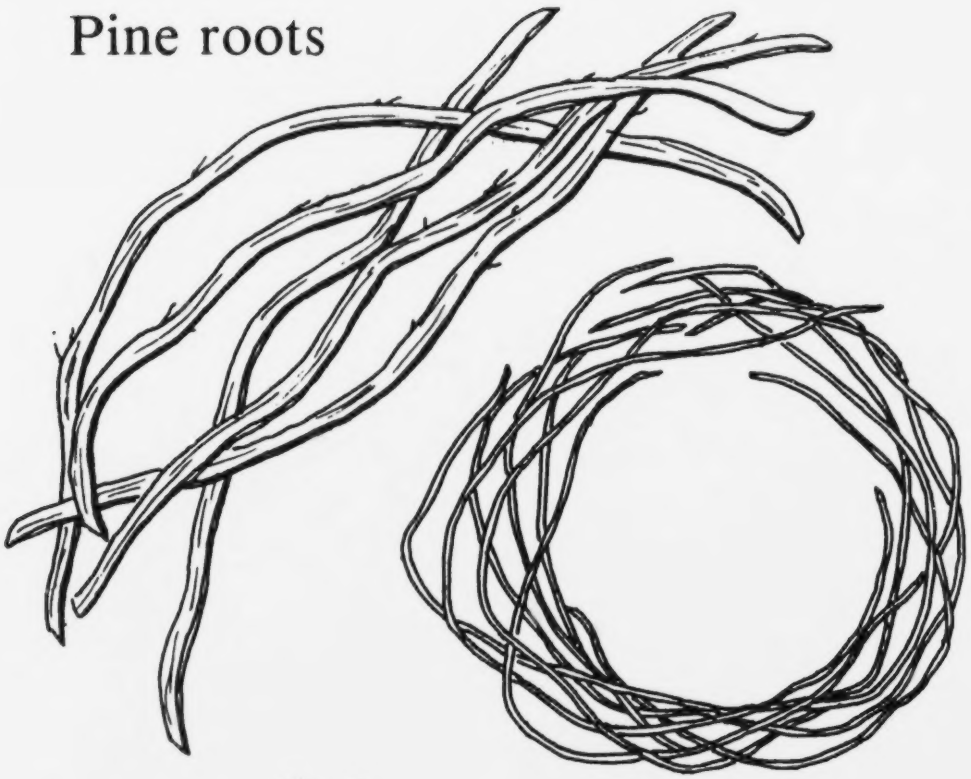


(fig. 5)

They are split evenly to the desired width, then coiled, sorted, and tied for storage.

The roots are very durable and expand when wet, and are therefore good for baskets used for holding water.

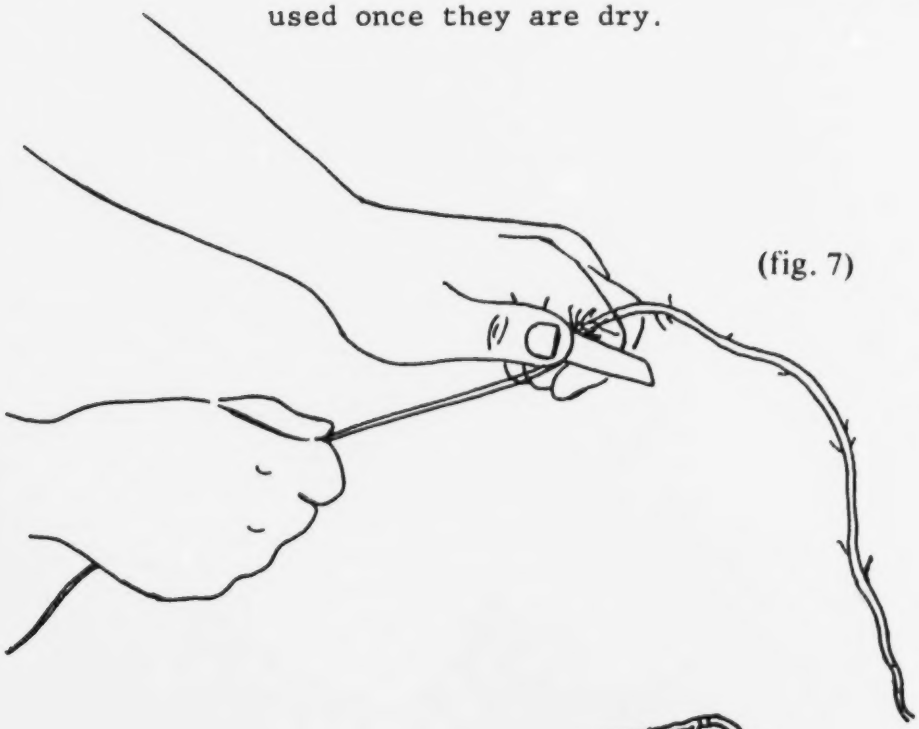
Pine roots



(fig. 6)

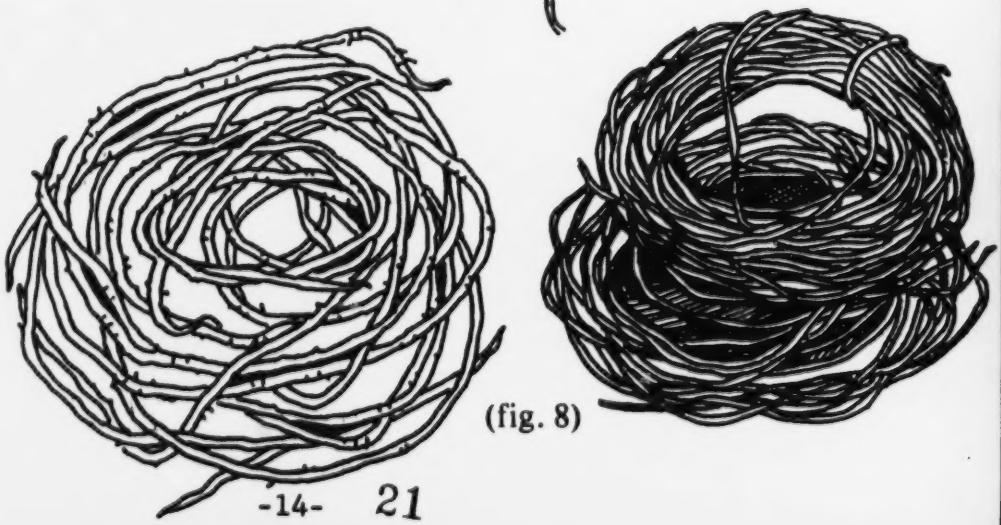
2. River roots (Willow roots, ᐧS-ↃO-ↄᐧP)

Willow roots are pulled up in the spring, when the river has risen and then receded rapidly so that the banks are cut away to expose the roots. While still damp, the roots are easily stripped of bark and can be used as is, or split at once. The roots are sorted and coiled according to width, and used once they are dry.



(fig. 7)

River roots
(willow roots)



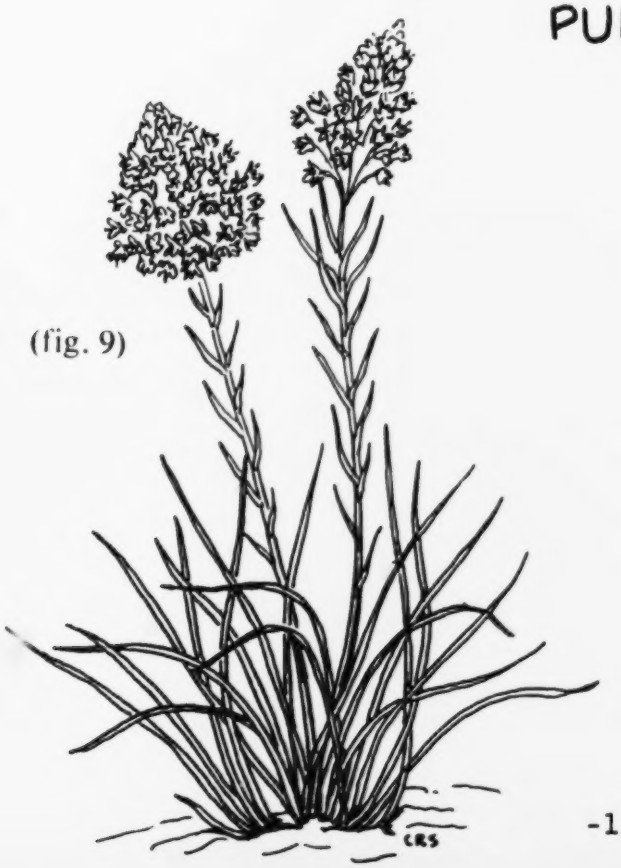
(fig. 8)

C. Bear Grass (PUN-YÚ-ROR)

Bear grass is used for the white color overlay in the weft. Bear grass is picked in the spring and summer in high meadows, in areas that have been burnt off the previous year. The burning causes the new shoots in the center of the clump of grass to stick together at the tips. This makes gathering easy.

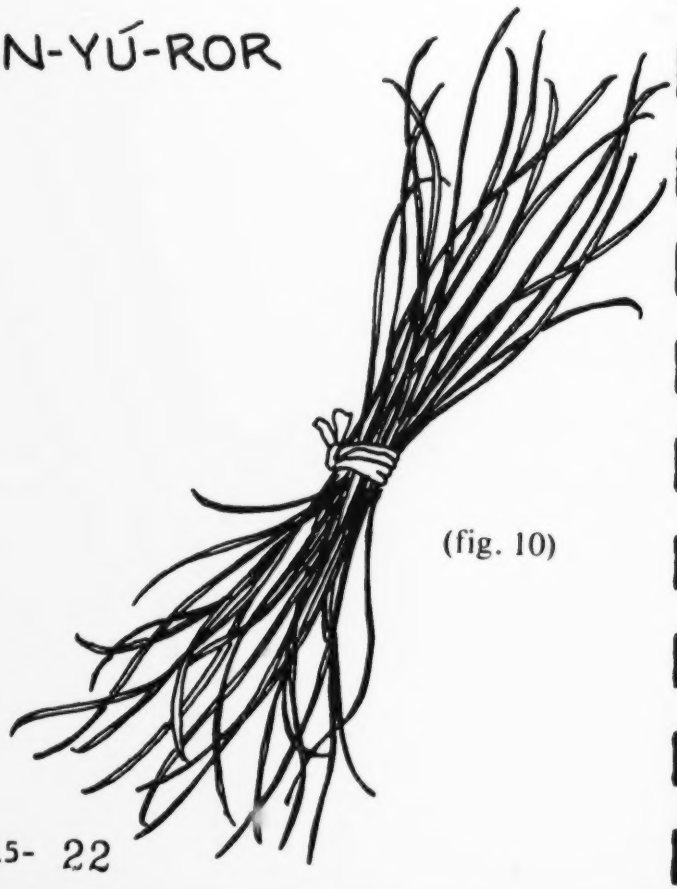
The grass must be laid out in the sun for several days and turned often to bleach the grass to a white color. The grass is then sorted into bundles and tied (fig. 10).

Bear grass



(fig. 9)

PUN-YÚ-ROR



(fig. 10)

D. Ferns

1. Woodwardia (TÍÍP-TIP)

Woodwardia fern is used for red overlay designs. This large fern is found in moist, shady, wooded areas. The best time to pick the fern is in the fall or winter. The fern is picked at the base and stripped of leaves. The stem is pounded flat with a rock (fig. 12), then twisted in order to take out the two inner strands (fig. 13). These strands are then dyed with alder bark to give them a reddish color. The strands are then dried and coiled for storage.

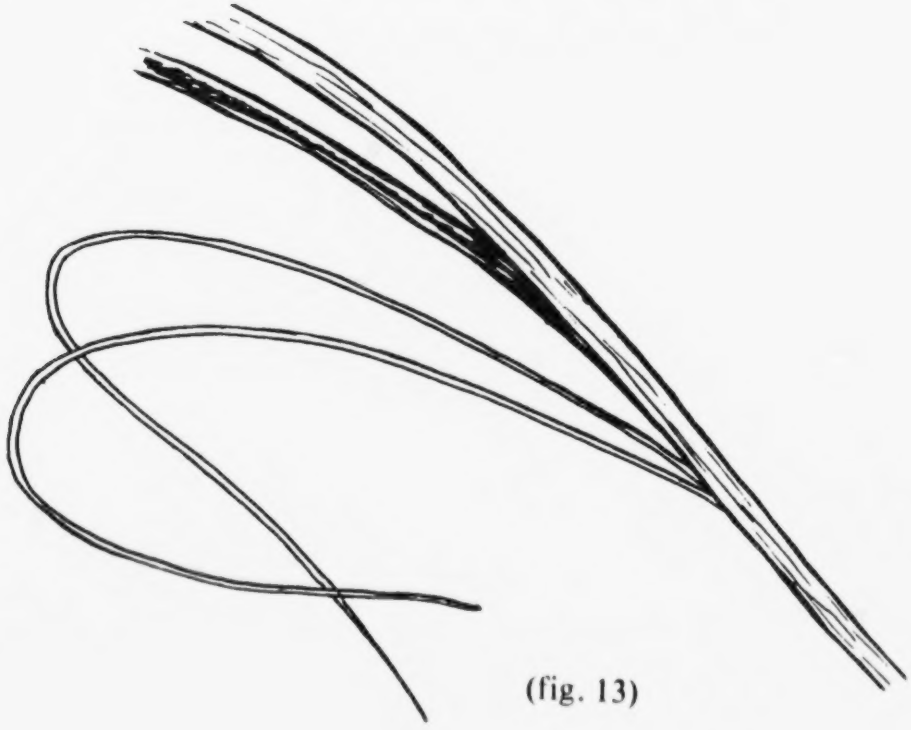
Woodwardia fern

(fig. 11)

23

TÍÍP-TIP

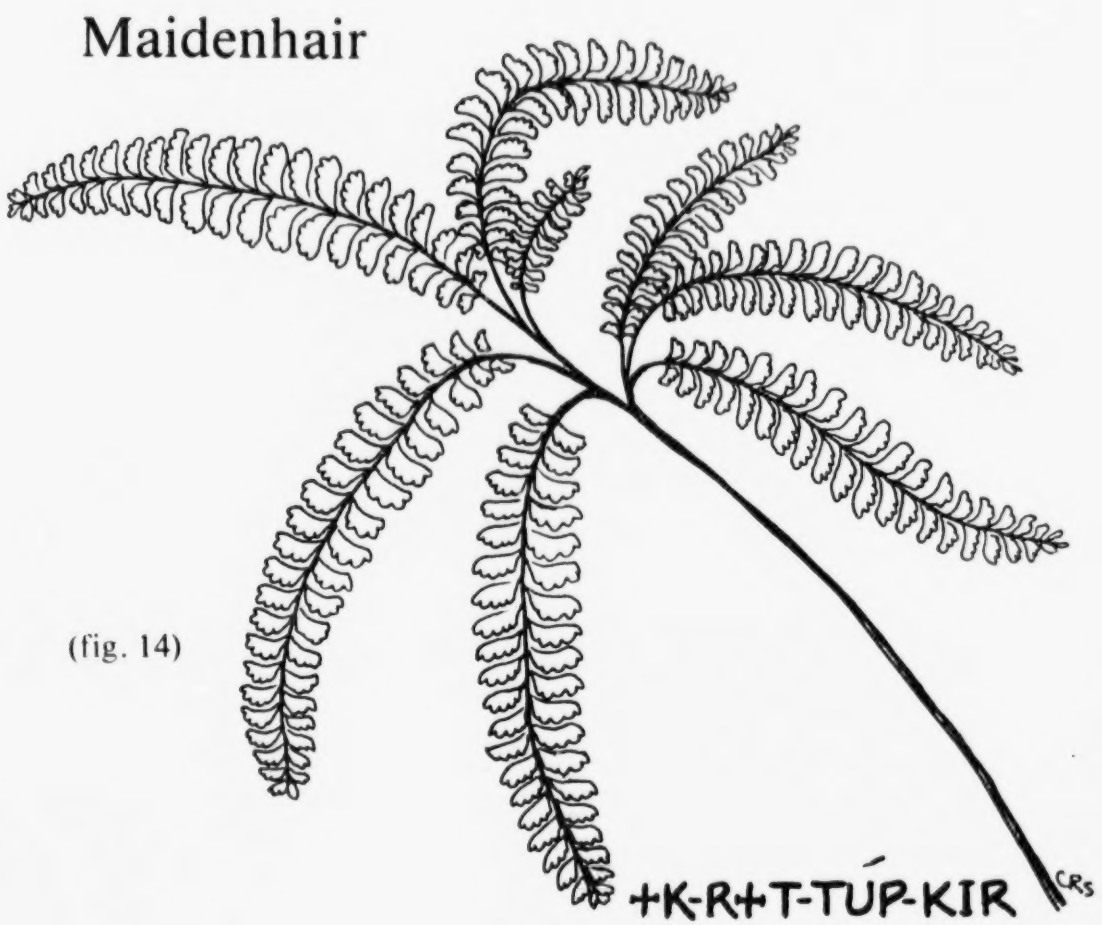
(fig. 12)



(fig. 13)

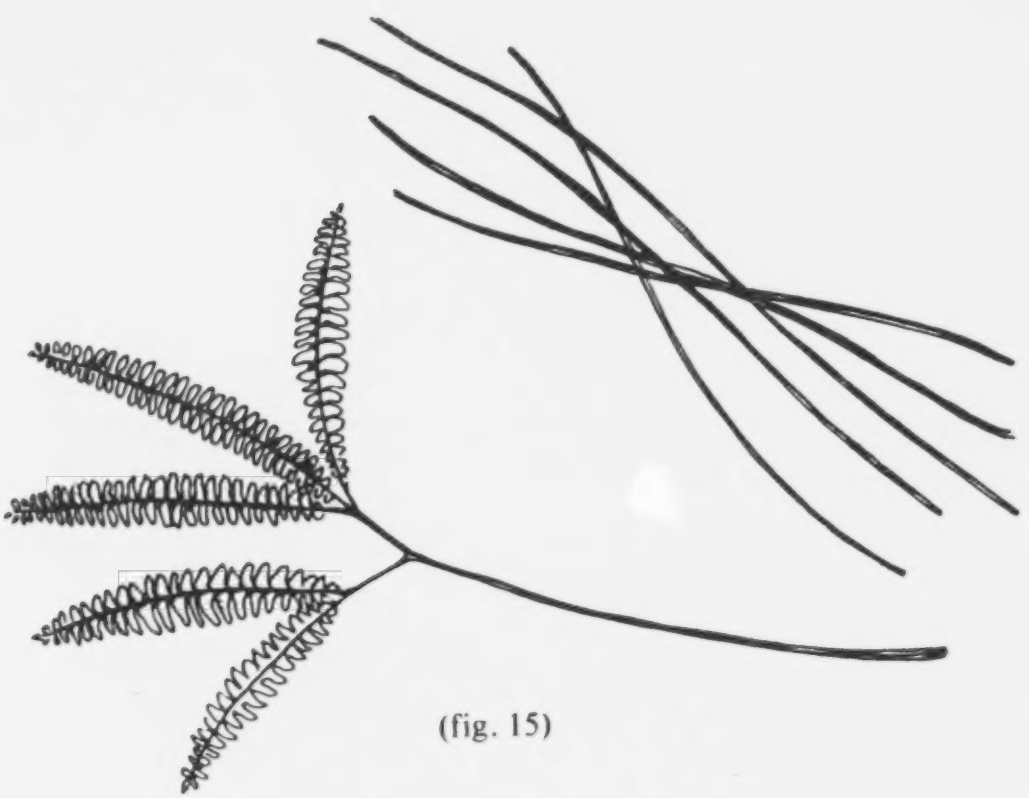
2. Maidenhair (+K-R+T-TÚP-KIR)

Maidenhair fern is used for the black overlay designs. This fern grows in areas near water or in foggy, damp areas under conifer trees.



(fig. 14)

All the leaves are stripped from the dark stem of the fern. The stems may be stored in this manner or split when fresh. The stems are very brittle and should be well soaked before preparation. A split stick is used to draw the stem through to flatten and split it. When splitting, the dark and lighter side of the stem are separated. Your fingernail is used to finish splitting the two sides and to scrape out the inside. Only the dark side of the stem is saved for use, and only the main stem.



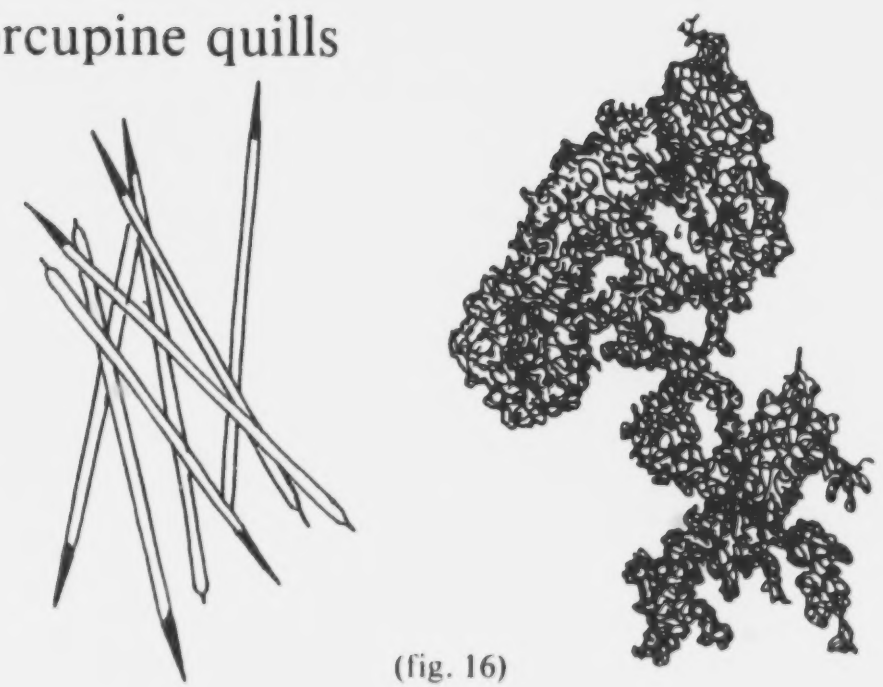
(fig. 15)

E. Porcupine Quills

Porcupine quills are dyed yellow with moss (tree lichen) and used for overlay design. Because they are hard to work with, they are used less often than the other design materials. The entire, whole quills are woven with the weft into the basket design.

Moss (tree lichen)

Porcupine quills

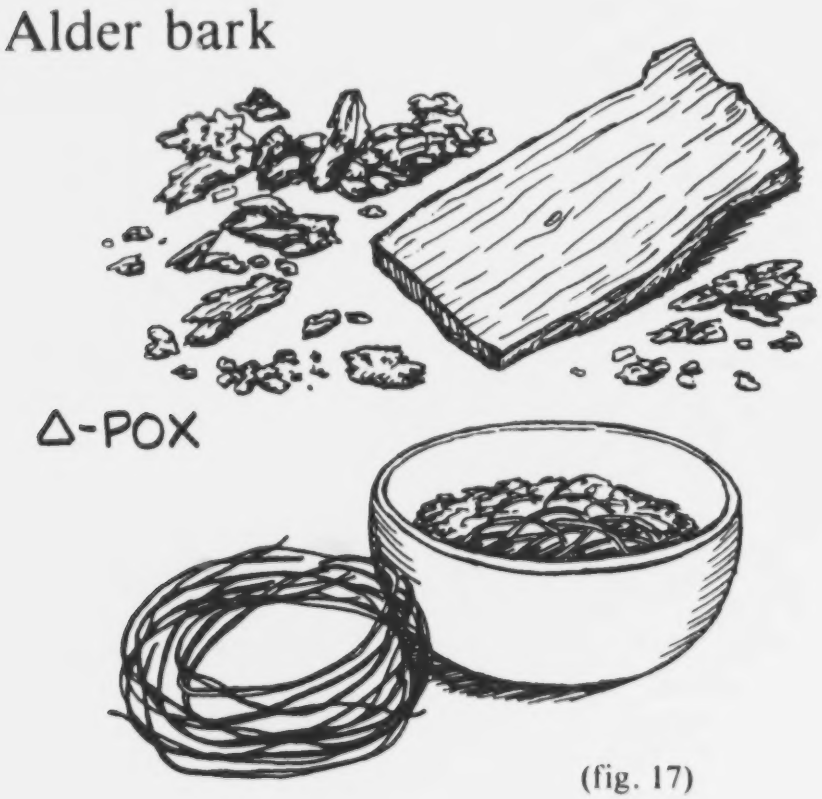


(fig. 16)

F. Dyes

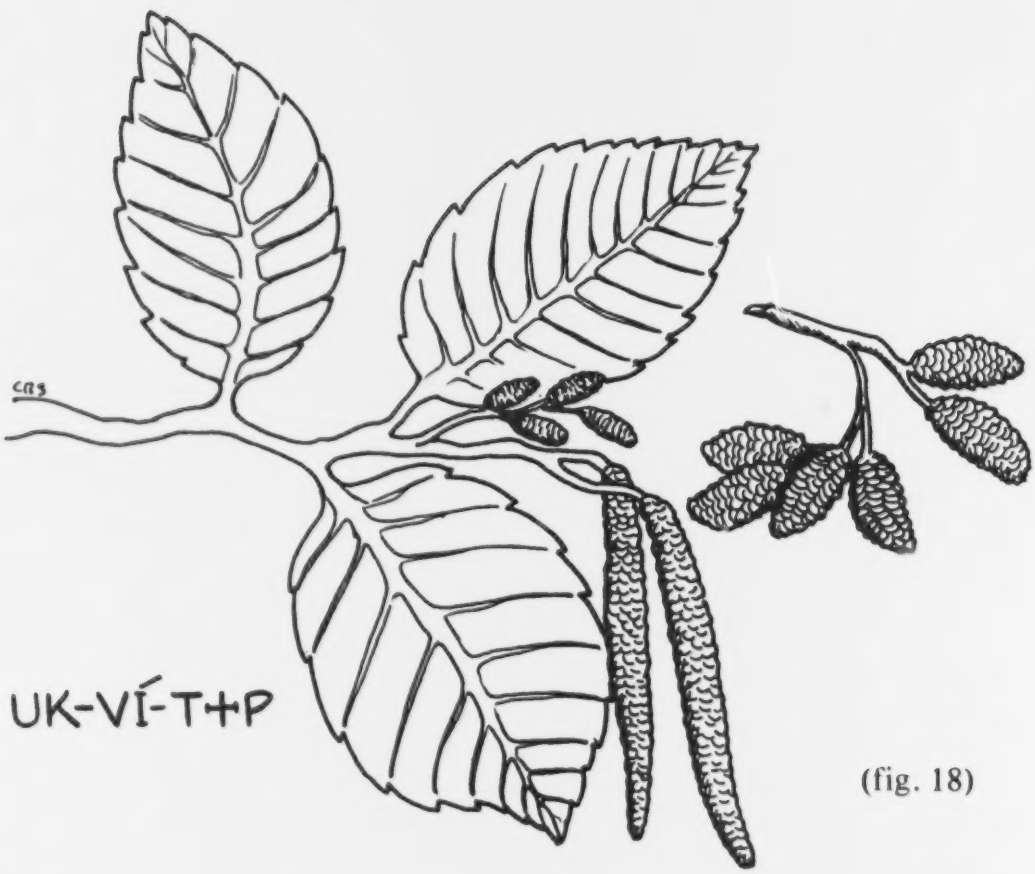
1. Alder Bark (Δ-POX)

Alder bark is used to dye the Woodwardia fern a reddish brown color. Some of the bark is cut and peeled off the tree, but never enough to harm the tree. The outer bark is discarded, and the inner bark is smashed and put in warm or cool water. The Woodwardia fern is soaked in the bark-water mixture and let cool, or soaked for a day until the right color is reached. The fern is removed from the dye and let dry (fig. 17).



(fig. 17)

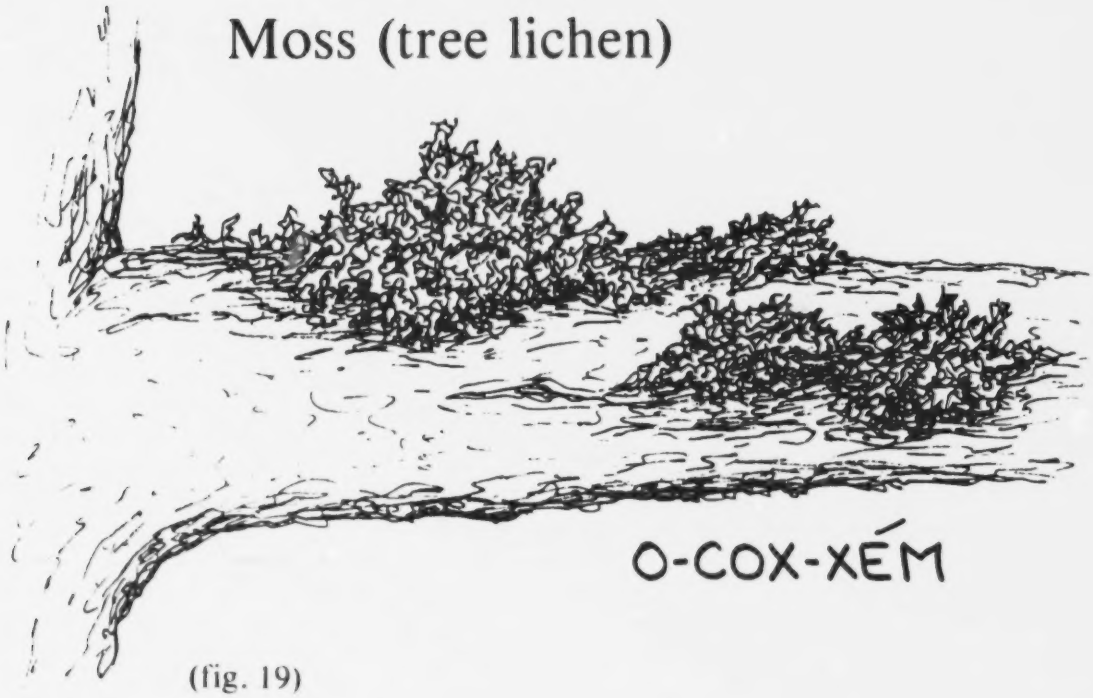
Alder



(fig. 18)

2. Tree lichen (O-COX-XÉM)

The lichen (moss) is used to dye porcupine quills. It is added to water which is then heated to boiling. The quills are then put in and left in the dye until a nice bright yellow color is reached.



(fig. 19)

Basket Types

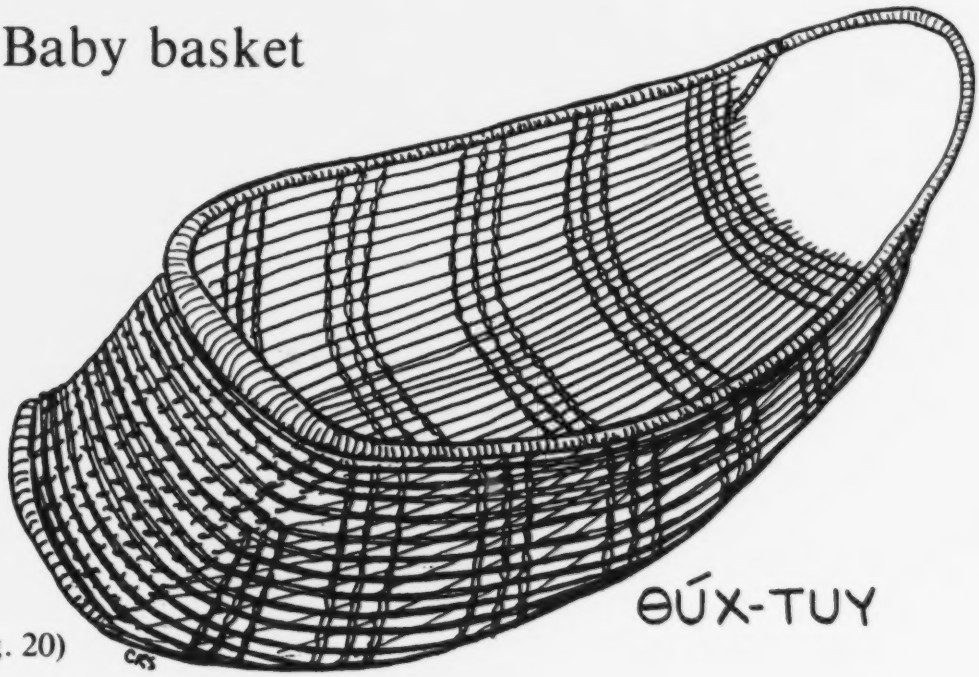
IV. Basket Types

A. Baby Basket (θÚX-TUY)

This type of basket is still used today by many Karuk mothers. Its shape and comfort make the baby feel secure, as in the cradle of its mother's arms. The girls' basket has a wider bottom, while the boys' has a narrower one. A new and larger basket is made as the child outgrows the old one.

The baby basket is usually made with strong, thick hazel sticks for the warp, and smaller or split hazel sticks for the weft. Roots are not strong enough for use in this type of basket.

Baby basket



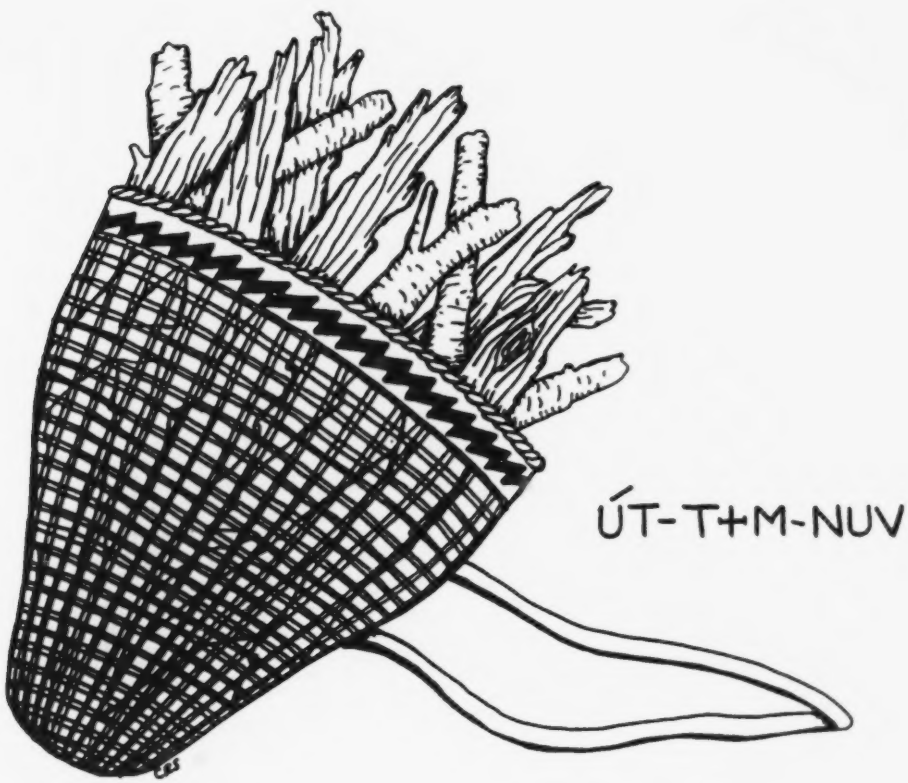
(fig. 20)

B. Burden Basket (ÚT-T+M-NUV)

This is an open-weaved, conical shaped basket about three feet high. It is carried on the back, with a leather strap around the forehead.

This open twined burden basket was used for carrying acorns or seeds.

Burden basket

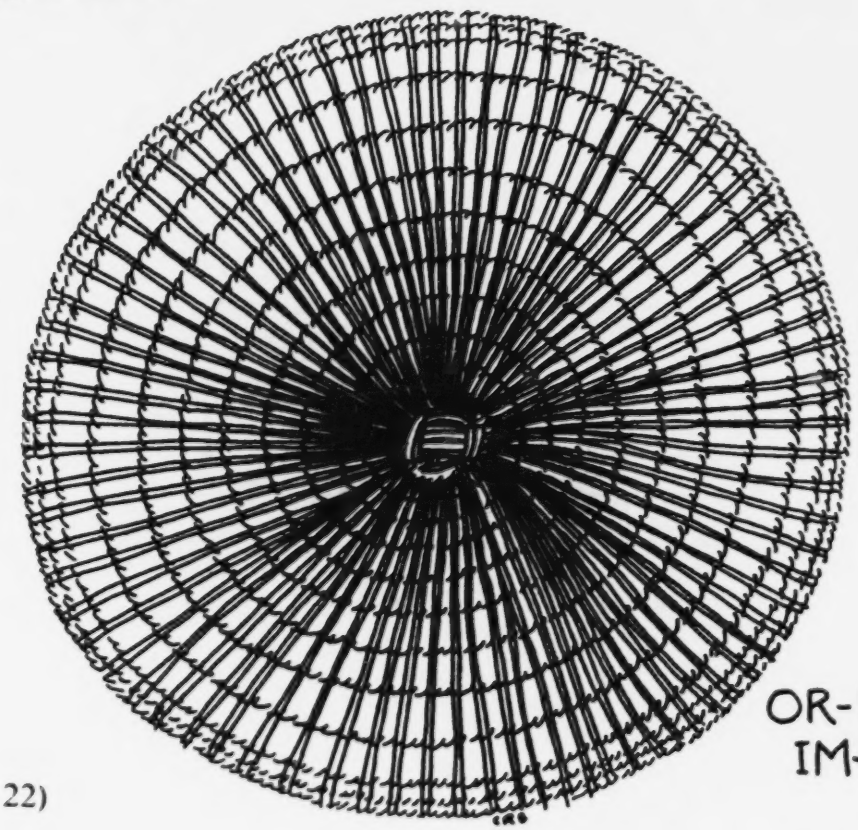


(fig. 21)

C. Sifting/Serving Basket (OR-ROR-RΔ-IM-VÓR-RUM)

This type of flat, open-weave basket (1 to 2 feet in diameter) is used for sifting and sorting berries. A flat, open twined basket tray is also used for serving fish or other food.

Sifting basket



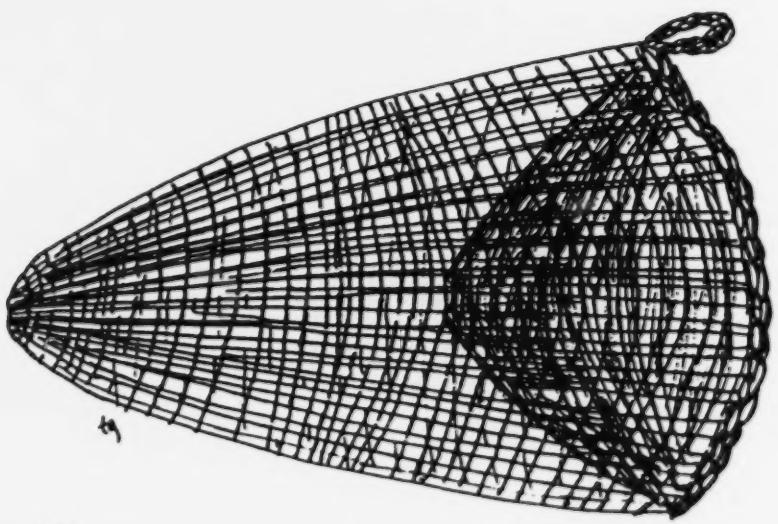
OR-ROR-RΔ-
IM-VÓR-RUM

(fig. 22)

D. Eel Basket Trap

This type of basket is used for a trap in the river to catch eels. It was made by men from unpeeled sticks. Once the eel gets in through the small, conical opening, it can't escape until the lid is undone.

Eel basket trap

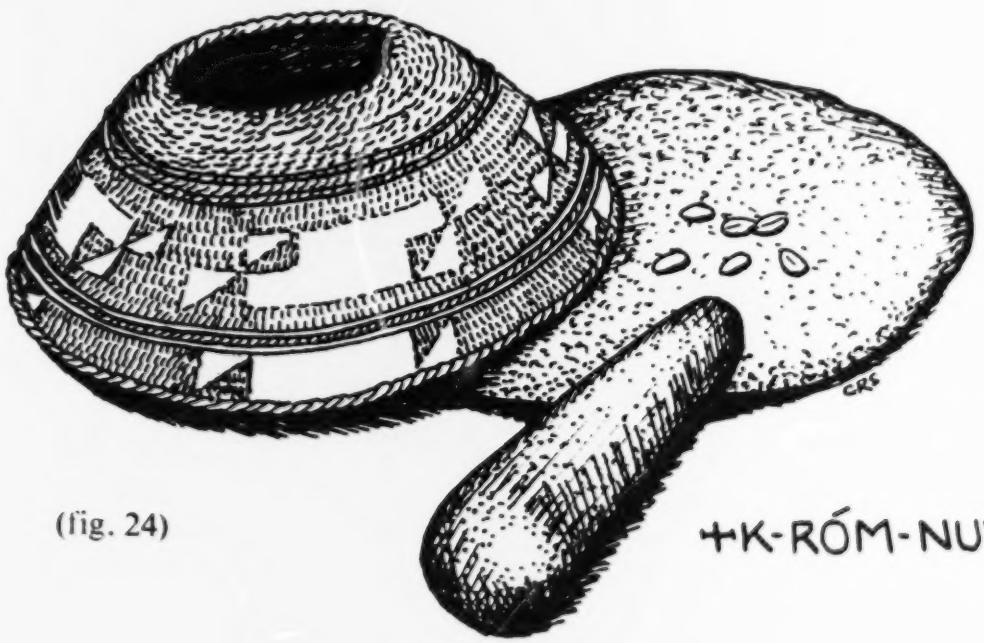


(fig. 23)

E. Acorn Pounding Basket (+K-RÓM-NUV)

This closed weave basket is made of closely twined roots on a sturdy stick base. The bottom is cut out to fit over a grinding rock. It keeps the meal from scattering when pounding the acorns with a pestle. Bear grass is used for simple designs around the outside.

Acorn pounding basket

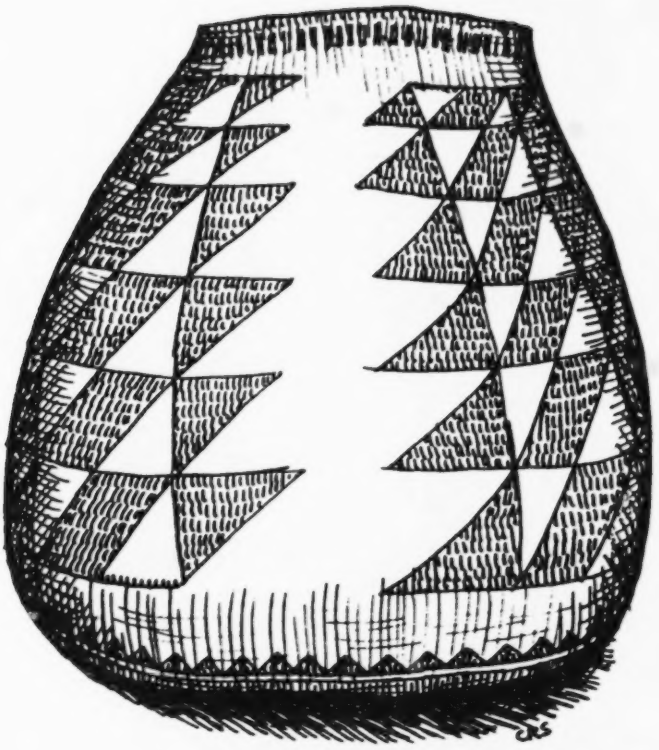


(fig. 24)

F. Storage Basket (C+́P-NOK-MÚ-YON-NUR)

These large baskets with small openings are decorated with simple bear grass designs. The designs are created by leaving the weft, or root, exposed.

Storage basket



(fig. 25)

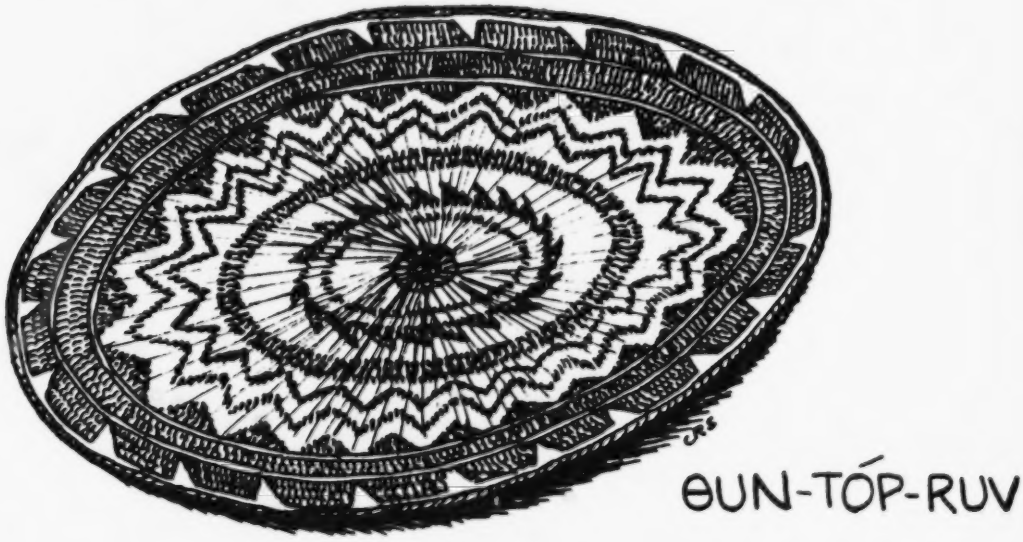
C+́P-NOK-MÚ-YON-NUR

G. Acorn Sifting Basket (θUN-TÓP-RUV)

A large tray is often used for sifting acorns. It is faced with grass and exposed roots to create the designs. A smaller, more closely woven tray was used to catch the fine acorn meal.

A finely woven, more elaborate tray was used for gambling.

Acorn sifting basket

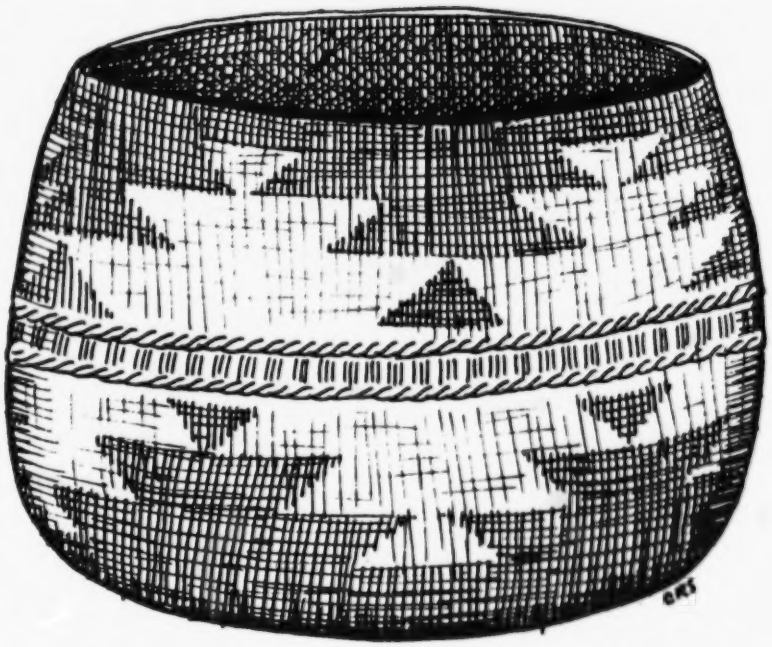


(fig. 26)

H. Cooking Basket (ΘOR-RÚM-POK-ROV)

This type of basket is shaped like a large bowl with fairly straight sides. Simple designs in grass were used on the upper portion. The basket is water tight.

Cooking basket



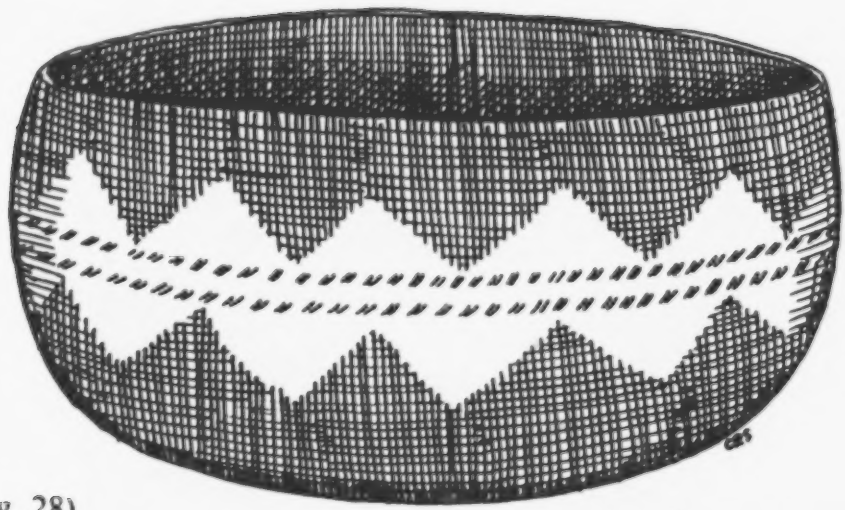
(fig. 27)

ΘOR-RÚM-POK-ROV

I. Acorn Soup Bowl (PÚT-TU-ROV)

This basket is made like a cooking basket but much smaller in size.

Soup bowl



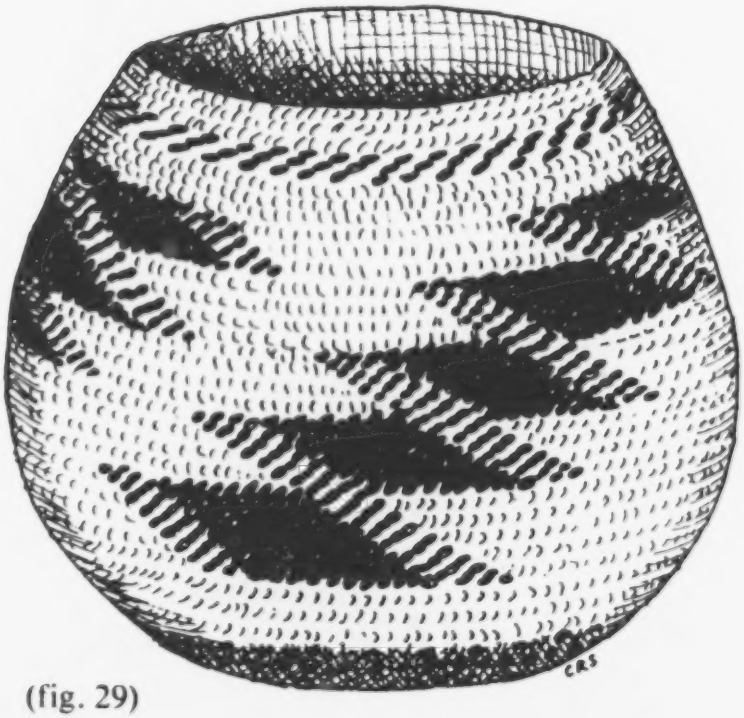
(fig. 28)

PÚT-TU-ROV

J. Decorated Basket

This basket can be any size. It is entirely decorated with red, white, black, or yellow designs. It is bowl-shaped with the rim turning slightly in. This basket can be used around the house or given as a gift.

Decorated basket



(fig. 29)

K. Tobacco Pouch (I-HÁR-U-HU-CƗP-NUK)

This is a small basket with a lid that is attached to a small opening. The designs are simple and often created with grass and exposed root.

Tobacco basket

(fig. 30)

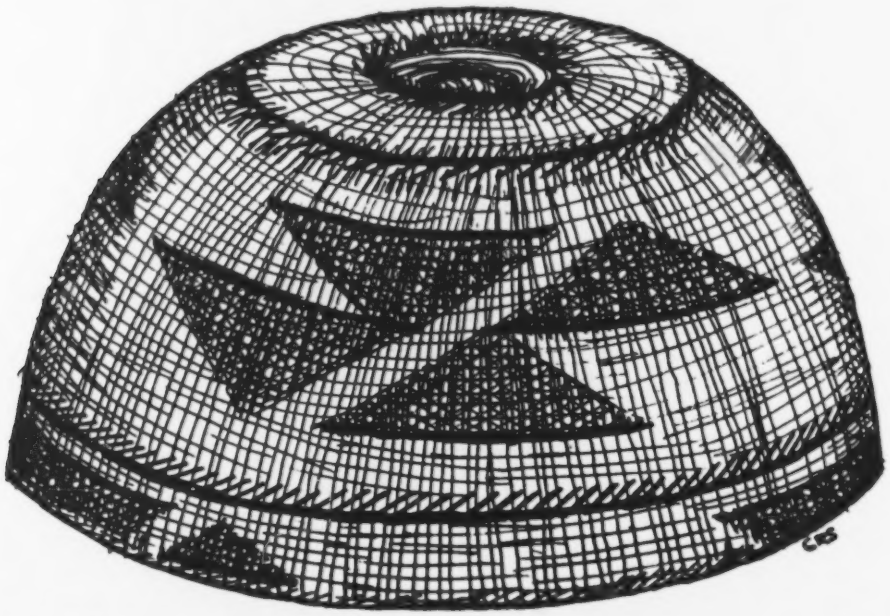
I-HÁR-U-HU-CƗP-NUK

L. Basket Hat (OR-ROR-RÓ-ÚP-XON)

The hats are made by highly skilled basket makers because they are difficult to shape properly and require fine weaving.

There are two types of hats. The everyday or work hats fit the head closely and are rounded or pointed at the top. They are fairly plain in design. The ceremonial or dress hats are decorated with overlays of every color used in baskets. Beads, shells, and woodpecker scalps are often sewn on the top. This hat has a flatter top and does not touch the top of the head.

Basket hat



(fig. 31)

OR-ROR-RÓ-ÚP-XON

Starting a Basket

V. Starting a Basket

A. Soaking (PO-OOR)

All materials must be soaked in water before weaving. This makes them flexible for weaving. The maidenhair should be soaked at least a day ahead of use. Most other materials should be soaked for an hour or so before they are used; if soaked too long, their colors change. The Woodwardia fern should be dampened and kept damp, not soaked.

B. Getting Started

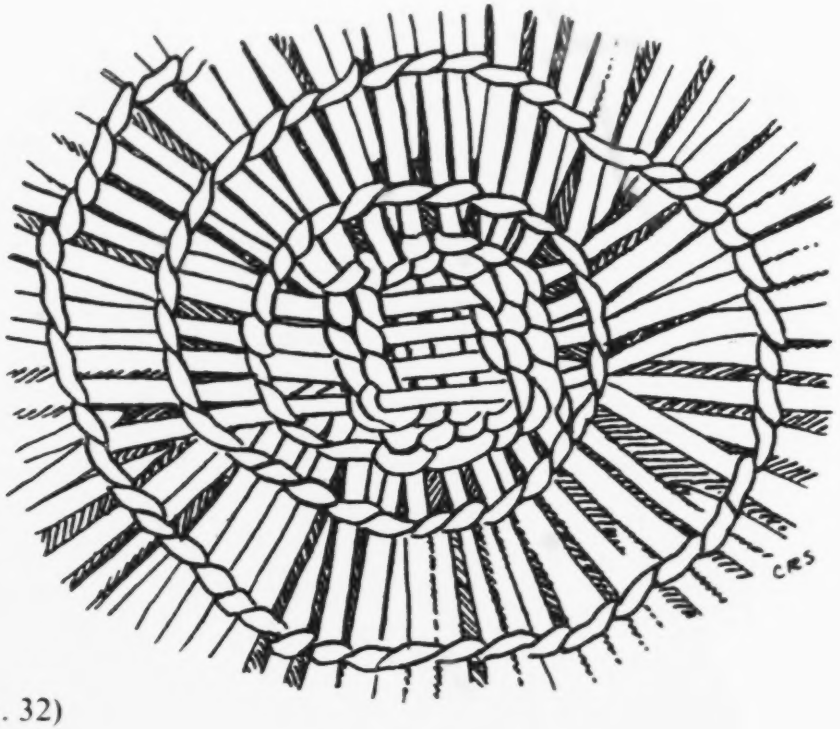
Most weaving is done while sitting on a low stool or on the knees, with materials and water nearby for soaking.

C. Frame of Mind

Frame of mind is important to the work of the weaver. Good feelings and thoughts help create good baskets. Creating a basket takes patience, knowledge, and skill.

D. Open Weave Twining: Basket Start

Select sticks according to desired width. Start around the outside with two-strand weaving to make the "button." Continue around in two-strand weaving, adding sticks as you go, into the warp and the weft, as needed. Keep adding sticks until you have almost reached the desired diameter. Keep weaving and the edges will turn up automatically.

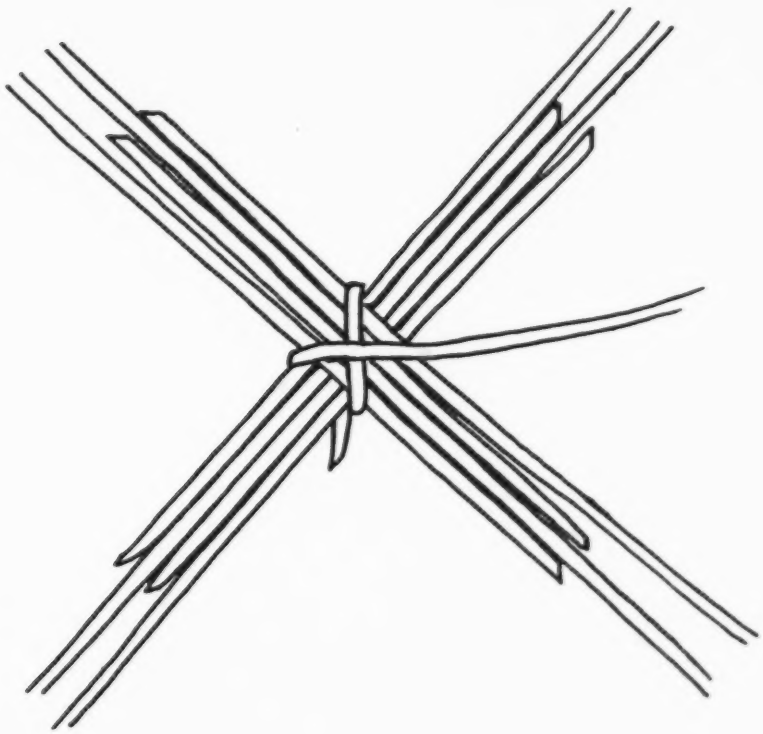


(fig. 32)

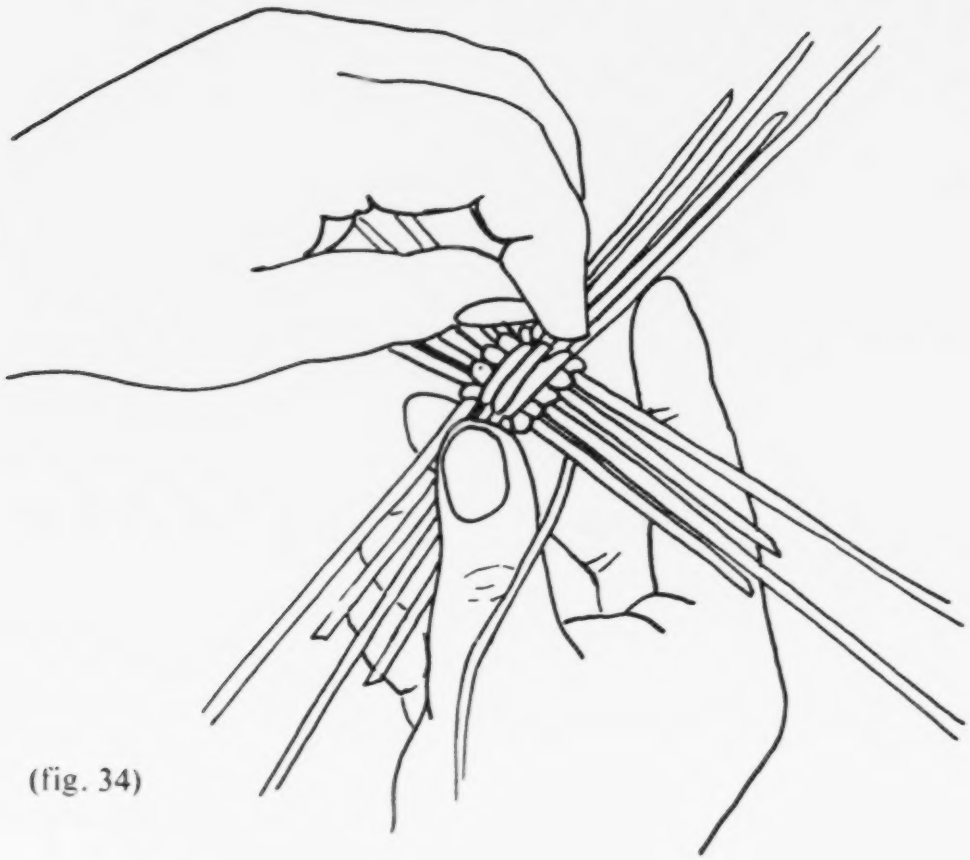
E. Closed Weave Twining

1. Basket start

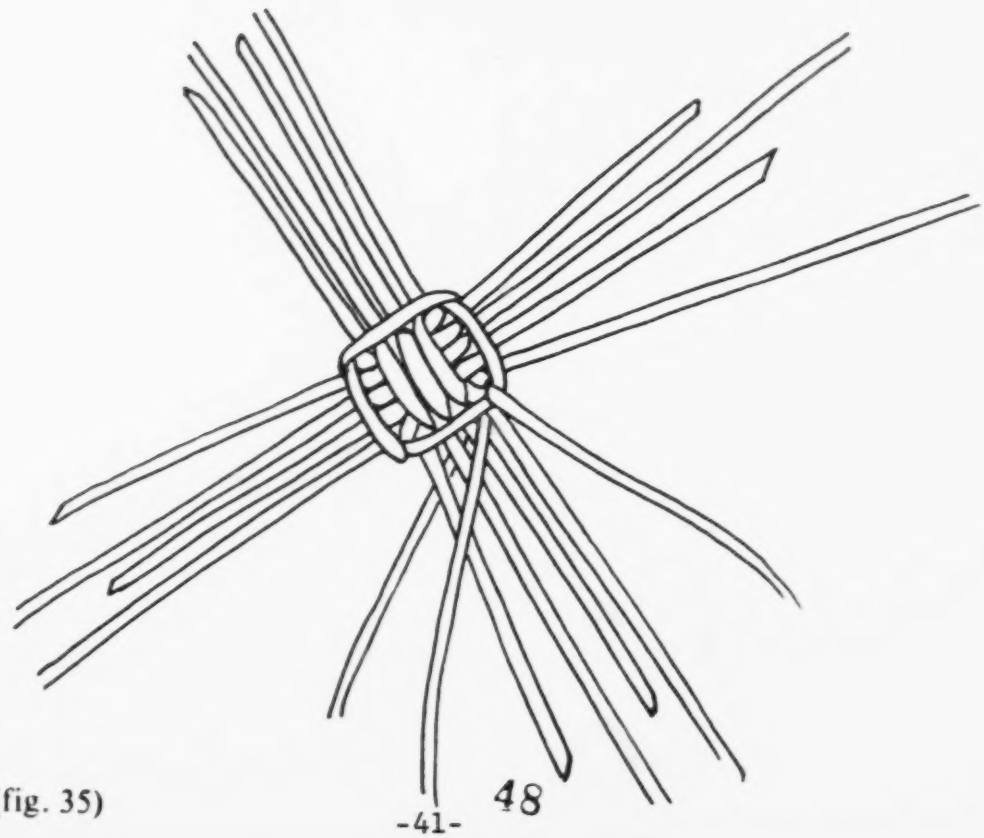
Sort sticks and roots according to desired size. Start basket as shown in figure 33. Make the button as shown in figure 34. Then add third root (fig. 35). Go around entire button once with the three weave to set the sticks.



(fig. 33)



(fig. 34)



(fig. 35)

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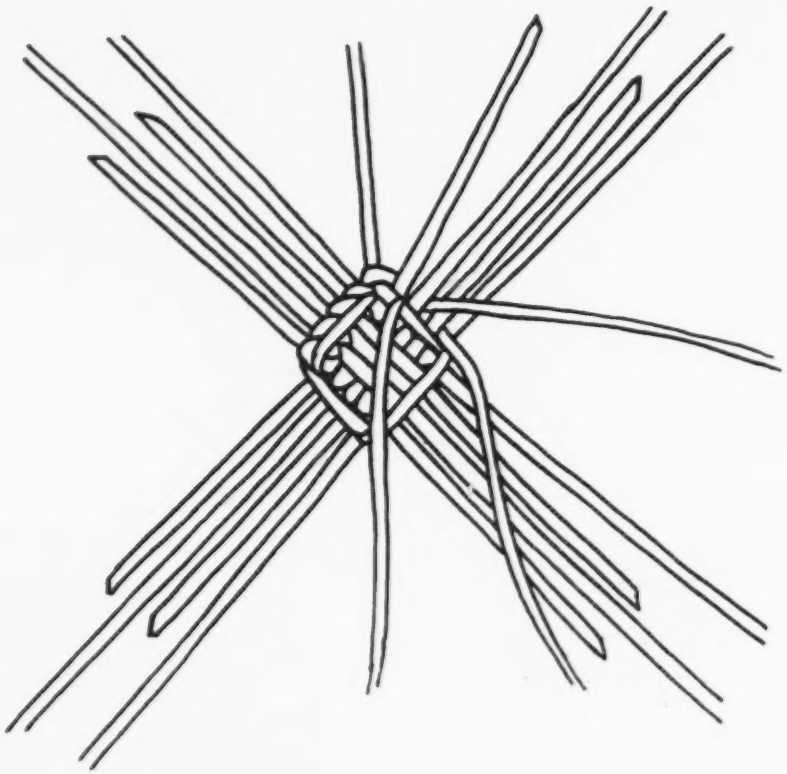
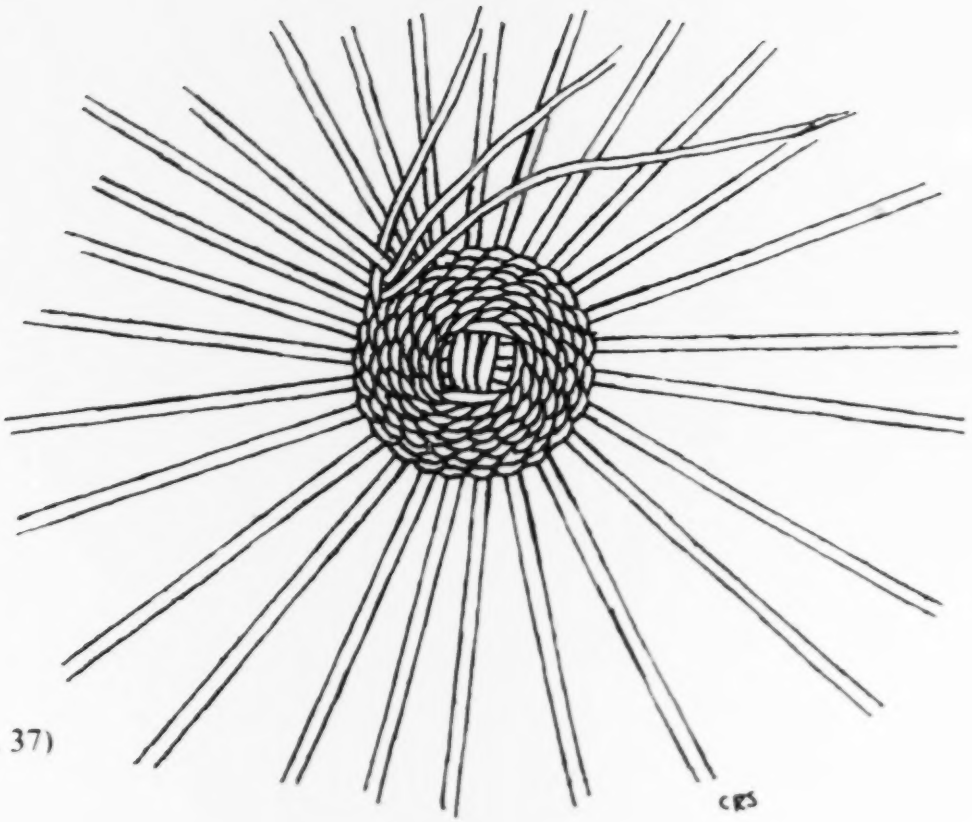
2. Adding sticks

Add a stick in each open corner of your basket on the next time around (fig. 36). Lock in place with the three weave around again. Chew the end of the stick where it will be inserted. Now add a stick every other one. Then lock them into place with the three weave again (fig. 37).



(fig. 36)



(fig. 37)

3. Color overlay

The overlay materials are added so that the designs and color show only on the outside of the basket (fig. 38).

F. Designs

The overlay materials are used to create the designs of the baskets. These include the beige of the root, white of the bear grass, black of the maidenhair fern, red of the alder-dyed Woodwardia, and yellow of the moss-dyed porcupine quills.

The designs are geometric patterns. There are usually an odd number (3, 5, 7) of designs on the basket. A beginning weaver must count the sticks to make the design come out right. A skilled and experienced weaver can do it by sight.

Different arrangements and variations of the basic designs are used to create the individual basket. Each one has a uniqueness of its own.

(fig. 38)

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